Serial No.: 10/811,498

CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A method of operating a game comprising the steps of :

- displaying a line game; ~~and~~

- operating a meter displayed as <u>at least three</u> different statuses of an evolving symbol; <u>and</u>

- <u>triggering a feature based on at least one of said statuses.</u>

~~Wherein at least one of said statuses is used in said line to trigger a feature.~~

2. (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the meter is used to gather occurrences of at least one of (1) a predetermined symbol; (2) a predetermined combination of symbols; (3) an event dependent of the game outcome; and (4) an event independent of the game outcome.

3. (original) The method of claim 2, wherein the event dependent of the game outcome is at least one of (1) a winning outcome; (2) a losing outcome; and (3) a prize value.

4. (original) The method of claim 2, wherein the event independent of the game outcome is at least one of (1) a spin; (2) an elapsed length of time; and (3) a bet value.

5. (original) The method of claim 1, wherein said evolving symbol occurs on a reel, each occurrence of said evolving symbol comprising an Evolving Symbol Unit (ESU).

6. (original) The method of claim 5, wherein all ESUs evolve upon occurrence of an evolution trigger.

7. (original) The method of claim 6, wherein the evolution trigger occurs when the meter reaches a predetermined threshold.

8. (original) The method of claim 5, wherein only a portion of the ESUs evolve upon occurrence of an evolution trigger.

9. (original) The method of claim 8, wherein the evolution trigger occurs when the meter reaches a predetermined threshold.

10. (original) The method of claim 8, wherein the number of evolving ESUs is randomly selected.

11. (original) The method of claim 8, wherein the evolving ESUs are randomly selected.

12. (original) The method of claim 8, wherein the evolving ESUs are those displayed when the evolution trigger occurs.

13. (original) The method of claim 5, wherein all the evolving ESUs evolve at the same rate.

14. (original) The method of claim 5, wherein each evolving ESU evolves independently.

15. (original) The method of claim 1, wherein the feature triggered in the game by said evolving symbol is at least one of (1) a change in the symbol prize value; (2) a new pay table; (3) a bonus payout; (4) a wild feature; (5) an on-screen bonus; and (6) a second-screen bonus.

16. (original) The method of claim 15, wherein the meter is used to gather occurrences of at least one of (1) an event dependent of the game outcome; and (2) an event independent of the game outcome, wherein said event dependent of the game outcome comprising at least one of (1) a predetermined symbol; (2) a predetermined combination of symbols; (3) a winning outcome; (4) a losing outcome; and (5) a prize value; and said event independent of the game outcome comprising at least one of (1) a spin; (2) a length of time; and (3) a bet value.

17. (original) The method of claim 15, wherein said evolving symbol occurs on a reel, each occurrence of said evolving symbol comprising an Evolving Symbol Unit (ESU) and wherein at least one of said ESUs evolve upon occurrence of an evolution trigger.

18. (currently amended) A game apparatus comprising:

- a meter gathering occurrences of a predetermined event;

- a display controller displaying said meter as at least three different statuses of an evolving symbol, according at least in part to a value of said meter; and

Serial No.: 10/811,498

- an evaluation means triggering a feature in a line game, ~~wherein at least one of said statuses is used in said line game to trigger said feature~~ <u>based on at least one of said statuses</u>.

19. (currently amended) A computer program embodied on a computer readable medium having codes adapted to:

- gather occurrences of a predetermined event in a meter; ~~and~~

- display said meter as <u>at least three</u> different statuses of an evolving symbol; <u>and</u>

- <u>trigger a feature based on at least one of said statuses.</u>

~~Wherein at least one of said evolving symbols is used in said line to trigger a feature.~~

20. (currently amended) A computer program carried on an electrical or electro-magnetic carrier signal having codes adapted to:

- gather occurrences of a predetermined event in a meter; ~~and~~

- display said meter as <u>at least three</u> different statuses of an evolving symbol; <u>and</u>

- <u>trigger a feature based on at least one of said statuses.</u>

~~Wherein at least one of said evolving symbol is used in said line to trigger a feature.~~

21. (new) A computer program having codes adapted to, when executed by a computer, cause said computer to:

- gather occurrences of a predetermined event in a meter; ~~and~~

- display said meter as at least three different statuses of an evolving symbol; and

- trigger a feature based on at least one of said statuses.